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Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grading ... A National Service

Fruit and Vegetable Division

Introduction

The marketing system in the United States permits fruits and vegetables to be grown where conditions are most suitable and still be delivered fresh and wholesome thousands of miles away. If you are part of this far-flung system, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) official grading services can make your job easier. For sellers, these services ensure that products meet specific grade or contract requirements; for buyers, grading services ensure that they get the quality they expect.

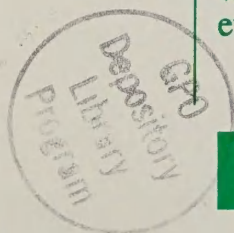
How is Grading Performed?

For fresh products, the grading services performed by USDA are inspections of produce shipments for their adherence to specific grade standards. Users of the service pay a fee to cover the cost of inspection. Grading is voluntary except for commodities that are regulated for quality by a marketing order or marketing agreement, or that are subject to import or export requirements.

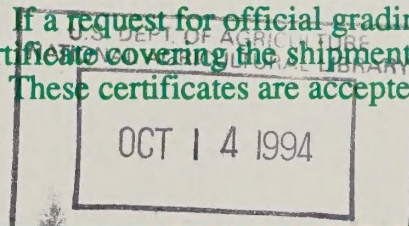
How are U.S. Grade Standards Used?

The bulk of the grading is conducted at shipping point as the produce is being packed for shipment to market. A produce shipment also may be graded at its destination to determine its current grade, either for the receiver's use in handling the lot or to settle questions which may arise between shipper and receiver. To provide grading service nationwide, USDA maintains cooperative agreements in all 50 States and Puerto Rico. Under these Federal-State agreements, federally licensed graders perform their work throughout the country at points of origin, often working in the fields as a crop is being harvested. In addition, Federal grading service is provided in 75 of the country's largest terminal markets.

As the basis for its fresh products grading services, USDA has developed official grade standards for fresh fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, peanuts, and related commodities. They describe the quality requirements for each grade of commodity, giving industry a common language for buying and selling. USDA has also developed a number of visual aids and guides to ensure that the standards are uniformly applied throughout the country. If a request for official grading is based on U.S. grade standards, the official certificate covering the shipment will show which USDA grade the product meets. These certificates are accepted as legal evidence in all Federal courts.



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How Can Use of the USDA Grading Services Benefit You?

Shippers of fresh produce can have their commodities graded for quality and condition at shipping point to establish the shipping quality of the product.

Receivers use the grading services to determine whether a shipment meets contract terms and to help select the best use for a particular shipment.

Institutional Buyers and Government Agencies use the grading services to draw up specifications to describe the quality of the produce they need and to inspect deliveries to ensure that they meet the required specifications.

Processors have their raw commodity deliveries inspected using grading services to determine payment to growers. Some also find grade reports useful in determining product storage life, and choosing the best use for particular lots.

How To Obtain Official Grading Services

For further information on fresh produce grading services, contact the Chief, Fresh Products Branch, Room 2056-South, Fruit and Vegetable Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456. Telephone: (202) 720-5870, FAX: (202) 720-0393, or the Federal or Federal-State grading office nearest you.

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